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LutheranWoman

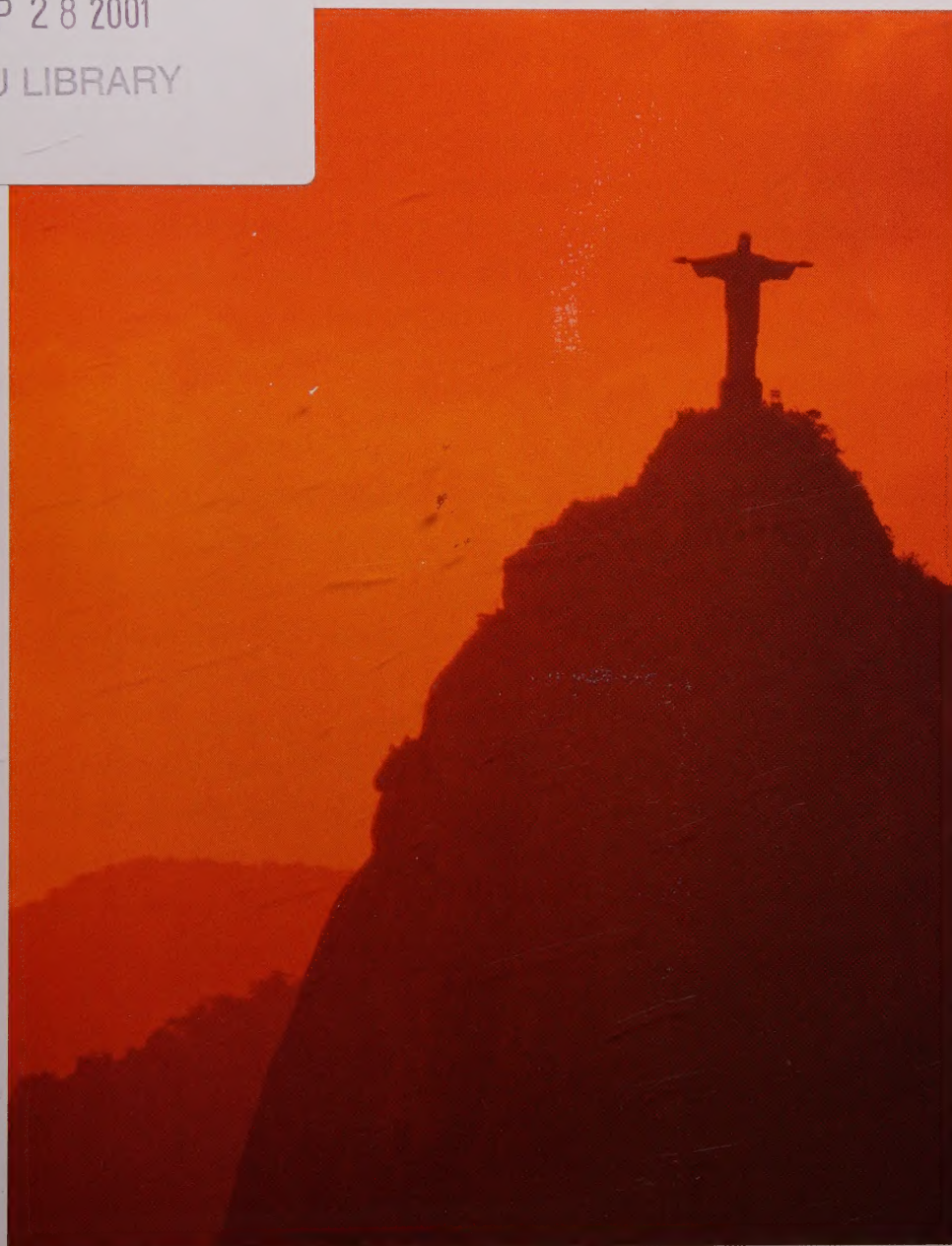
October 2001

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Six Good Reasons to Keep a Journal
Thanks-Giving Hands

What's Holy?
A Gift of Connections





EDITORS' NOTE & LETTERS

Dear Good and Faithful Readers,

This issue of *LWT* focuses on the ways we worship. We hope you find food for thought in the articles and columns. Please jot us a line if something you read stirs a memory or gives you a new thought. We also encourage you to take advantage of a couple sections specifically intended to be places to have your voice heard.

"Reader Call" offers something for everyone. Many readers have told us how much this opportunity to share personal experiences means to them. Each month's featured topic in "IdeaNet" gives you a chance to share ideas and resources. Now it is easier than ever to contribute to "IdeaNet" by using the card included in each issue.

Some upcoming topics and deadlines can be found on the inside back cover of the magazine. For a complete list, write or phone the *LWT* office (800-638-3522). We will be happy to provide you with a listing.

Blessings in Christ—the Editors

Letters

First of all I want to thank you for all the informative articles in your magazine. It makes for interesting reading, and usually I cannot put it down until I get all the articles read.

I am writing, however, about the Bible studies. Our circle has discussed this, and all agree: We would like to see the September through May Bible studies done as you present them for the summer months.

Jeannette Tweite—Byron, Minnesota

I just finished my June Bible study. It is biblical and thought-provoking, as most of our studies are. I appreciate that it was shorter than recent studies. I believe there will be more participation if the studies aren't too long, thus bearing more fruit. Thanks for listening.

Virginia A. Dyrud—Conrad, Montana

We are now developing the 2002–2003 Bible study. The Leader Guide will still be separate, but the resource book material will be in the magazine. Leaders should always feel free to tailor the study to the individual group's needs.—Eds.

Dear Susan Gamelin,

Thank you so much for "God's Family Reunion" printed in the June issue of *Lutheran Woman Today*. I have removed it from the magazine and placed it in my journal. It is the most meaningful article I have read in a long time.

Oh, how much I also pray and hope that your vision is the correct one and this is what we can expect from God's family reunion!

Jean Hart—Eugene, Oregon

Send letters to: Letters to the Editor, *Lutheran Woman Today*, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4183; email to: lwt@elca.org. Please include your name, city, and state on all correspondence. *LWT* publishes letters representative of those received on a given subject. Letters may be edited for space. Letters must be signed, but requests for anonymity will be honored.

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Cover "Christ the Redeemer" statue stands 100 feet tall on the hill of Corcovado in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Photo by Tracy Montana

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GIVE US THIS DAY

Gathering All the Places of Worship

by Marj Leegard

SOME OF US HAVE BEEN WORSHIPING IN THE SAME PLACE FOR 50 YEARS OR MORE. SOME OF US WORSHIP IN PLACES FAR AWAY FROM OUR CHILDHOOD CHURCH. MANY OF US FALL SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN.

The old church is the repository of many joys. We remember baptisms, the happy occasions when babies robed in grandmother's crocheting were welcomed into the family of God. We sang along to "Jesus Loves Me," and we believed. When our children stood at the altar rail at confirmation, we deplored together how fast time goes by. We hear the triumphant echoes of the organ that accompanied so many weddings. We see the lovely brides transformed into lovely mothers and even more lovely grandmothers.

The church, the pews, the altar, they all have depth and breadth, sound and meaning. When we are lonely, the memory of that final farewell for someone we love washes over us, and we think we will never see the place where the casket rested without feeling the awful finality of that day. And yet, worship goes on. The choir sings. The pastor preaches. Hope slowly returns. The image of death is softened by happy vignettes of the past and the hope of the life to come.

We are not sentimental over windows and bell towers. We are not particularly attached to the high pulpit. Instead, we are imbued with the whole of

worship: the days that were, the days that are, and the days yet to come. We don't fret over guitars or choruses. Worship is incorporated into the greetings, the questions, the conversations. Worship resonates with the bell and the organ. When the congregation sings, we still hear the lovely tenor voice now stilled. We listen for the strong, clear soprano and miss her when she visits her son in Buffalo. We smile as our sweetest member tags along with the responses.

Which setting? Which order? Communion once or twice a month? It hardly matters. We come to worship in a place that speaks worship to us. God is everywhere. God is most certainly here.

We are a desert people carrying the ark of place with us. In a church away from home with a marvelous organ there is, surrounding the music, the auditory image of Jean and Doris and Christine, whose music is borne along in the waves of melody from the big pipes. Around every pastor, the faces of old, familiar pastors appear, upholding and undergirding the Word still.

Worship is the gathering of all the places of the past, all the places of right now, and all the wonderful places yet to come in the gathering of the saints. May we all worship there.

LWT columnist Marj Leegard and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.

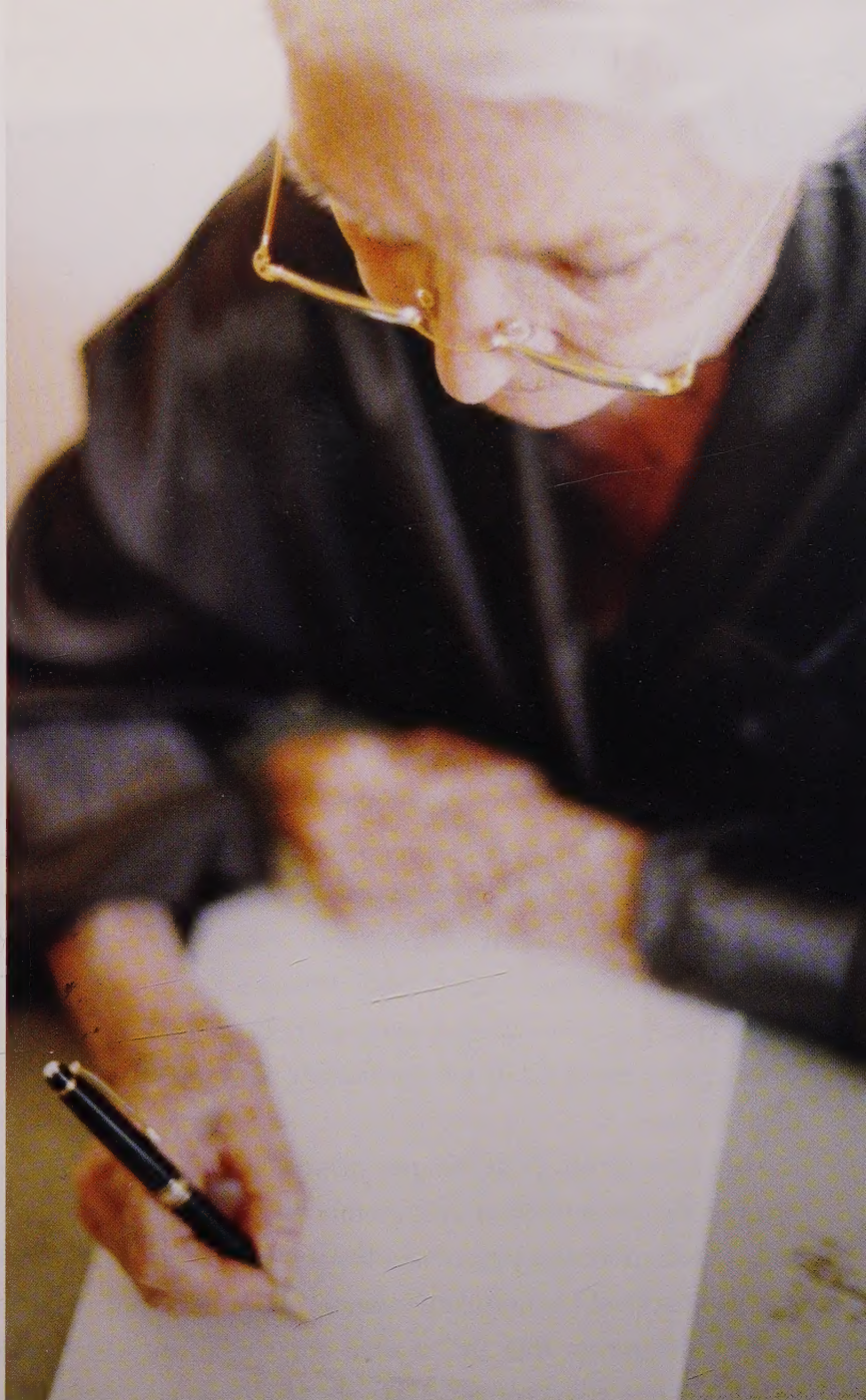
SIX good reasons to keep a journal

by Linda Claire Scott

Every morning I wake early, often before dawn. I make a cup of hot chocolate and sit quietly, contemplating life from my old rocker in the room at the top of the stairs. For me, rising early is one of the true pleasures of getting older. I can spend time alone with myself, just thinking, without any pangs of guilt about neglecting others' needs.

This quiet hour is the best time for my journaling. The word *journal* stems from Middle English. By dictionary definition, a journal is a little book containing forms of worship for the day hours. This seems an apt description to me. Journaling can become a spiritual experience when you understand it as a way of keeping a record of what God is doing in your life.

I've been keeping a journal for several years now. Recording my thoughts this way allows me to keep closer tabs on myself and all that happens in my life. It is like a ship captain's notations that are kept in a log; it helps me to fix my position, decide upon a course of action, and stay my course in times of clear or stormy weather.



Just as a snapshot captures the special beauty and presence of the moment,

Journaling is a custom as old as life itself. As a form of self-communication, it is without peer. As far as I know, there is no set pattern for keeping a journal; no one can say that there's only one right way. It is a personal thing, readily adaptable to your own particular need and proclivity.

Although one can journal anywhere, it is helpful to set aside a specific time for it. You can have journals in different locations: in the car, at work or at play, ready for travel or kept on a nearby bedside table for when you are at rest.

Some people keep a few journals going simultaneously, covering different subject matter. For me, that's too complicated. I can only keep up with one at a time. The pages I fill abound with my thoughts, quotations that seem pertinent, questions yet unanswered, Scripture quotations, poetry, books I find interesting, words heard in passing from friends or strangers, or thoughts that come full-blown yet not fully perfect.

My journal is not like my engagement calendar, which only keeps track of daily events. Instead, my journal acts more as a way of creating new thoughts and storing important remembrances.

It is important that we capture our words on paper. For it is with words that we speak and write and think and read and find solutions to our problems. We use words to communicate with each other, touching each other delicately or deeply. With words one can leave the lightest hint of having been there, or conversely, a deep impression that lasts long on the heart and in the mind.

Our words are powerful and important, for they represent our individualism, binding us to others or setting us apart by illuminating our separateness.

Words are records of our having been here and they are tools for communicating our hopes for the future.

Just as a snapshot captures the special beauty and presence of the moment, so a journal grounds us in that time and space by recording our experience. By journaling these moments, impressions can hold a place of permanence, important enough to be revisited and mulled over at a later time. At that time they can be meditated on and enlarged or eliminated at your discretion. Just remember to write that thought down!

There are many reasons keeping a journal helps you to grow spiritually. Here are a few:

1. A journal helps you to confront yourself honestly and to walk in truth, and this is pleasing to God. "I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 1:4).
2. Recording your thoughts in a journal helps to crystallize your feelings and goals. "Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart" (Proverbs 3:3, New American Standard Bible). It helps you to get to know God better. "Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths" (Psalm 25:4, New International Version).
3. Journaling keeps track of where you've been, where you are now, and where you're going. God provides the map. It is up to us to follow it. "Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this" (Revelation 1:19).

a journal grounds us in that time and space by recording our experience.

4. It helps you to keep track of prayer requests and answers so you can praise God for answers. You may also become aware of answers not before realized. "The prayer of the upright is his delight" (Proverbs 15:8).

"And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him" (1 John 5:14-15, NASB).

5. Journaling also promotes creativity. Since God is the giver of all creativity, it provides another way to commune with God through the gifts we receive. You might be surprised by what you discover in yourself and in others. "You alone are the LORD. You make the heavens, even the highest heavens and all their starry hosts, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of the heavens worship you" (Nehemiah 9:6, NIV).

6. Finally, what you write may become a legacy to those who follow after. "Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord" (Psalm 102:18, NIV).

This is a very compelling reason for keeping a journal. Few parents or grandparents take the time to tell their children the stories of their lives. And if they don't, the record of their lives may be lost. We have a duty to tell the stories, to leave a legacy for the young. Leaving a path for future generations to follow helps others to learn from our experiences, mistakes, and conclusions.

It is interesting to note that God was the first journal keeper. In the Bible we're told that God kept a book of remembrance. "Then those who feared the Lord talked often one to another and the LORD listened and heard it. And a book of remembrance was written before Him of those who thought on His name. And they shall be Mine, says the Lord of hosts, in that day when I publicly recognize and openly declare them to be my Jewels. My special possession. My peculiar treasure and I will spare them, as a man spare his own son who serves him" (Malachi 3:16-17, Amplified Bible).

What better reason for us to keep a journal than to follow the Lord's example. We all have stories to tell. Keeping a journal helps people who haven't before considered writing seriously to see leaving a record of their lives as important.

**"Now go, write it on a tablet before
them. And inscribe it on a scroll,
that it may serve in the time to
come as a witness forever."**

Isaiah 30:8, NASB

Linda Claire Scott is a freelance writer who believes that journaling helps us to grow spiritually while creating a legacy for future generations.



Faith Foundations

LWT recently asked Beth A. Zeilinger, vice president of operations at the National Institute on Media and the Family, to share some of her personal reflections about how her faith has provided a foundation for her life and her life's work. What follows are her candid thoughts. You will notice Beth's name again in our November issue, where she speaks on behalf of the Institute and helps us sort through the media messages that surround us concerning Christmas.—Ed.

I grew up as the oldest of five children, and there was one very clear message that our parents bestowed upon us about life: put faith and family before all other things. Although our family life was full of activities, from music and sports to school and church, there was one daily routine that we all followed: dinner as a family. This meal always started with a prayer. We knew that the purpose of the time together was to talk and share with one another, without the distraction of the television. During that nightly dinnertime, we each took a turn to talk about our day and share something about ourselves. I believe that the close relationship our family continues to have today is a direct result of our parents' focus on family and faith.

During my middle school and high school years, being actively involved in our church's youth groups had a big influence on me. The time spent at church and with those friends helped me decide to choose Augsburg, a small Lutheran college [in Minneapolis], as a place to begin my college career. Leaving my close-knit family for college was a big and intimidating step for me, so a small Christian college was an appealing choice. One of the most significant events that year was attending a worship service during the week between classes. Since college is a time when young people make potentially life-altering decisions, attending these services served as a helpful reminder about making choices that were consistent with my value system.

I obtained my bachelor of science degree from the University of Minnesota and have since begun working on a master of arts degree through the University of Minnesota, with plans to finish that degree at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul. For 17 years I worked with children and families, running educational programs in both hospital and community-based settings. For the past five years, I have worked for a nonprofit company called the National Institute on Media and the Family, in Minneapolis, where I currently hold the position of vice president of operations. I find it very rewarding to work for a company whose vision is focused on children and strives to create a culture of respect.

Media's impact on children, families, and communities is a personal passion of mine. The opportunity to work on behalf of children and families on a global level, striving to create a more civil society, is a dream come true. Although the National Institute on Media and the Family is not religiously affiliated, the issue of how mass media shapes attitudes, values, and resulting behavior very closely relates to how we as Christian parents want our children to be raised. Since mass media is an issue that affects each of us, I feel my career at the National Institute helps me make a positive difference for children, not only during my working hours but at home with my own children as well.

When I am spending time at home with my husband and two young boys (ages 9 and 11), it seems natural to combine our faith-based values into our daily lives and talk frequently about the conflicting values messages we often see through the media. Since dinnertime with prayers of thanks and conversation (without the intrusion of television) was such an important daily event in my formative

years, we have implemented this practice at our family dinner hour as well. Talking about our daily events, challenges, and successes helps us keep our family relationships strong and gives us some valuable time to talk about the importance of personal decision-making.

Since my mother has been the most influential woman in my life, I try very hard to emulate her practices as a mother, volunteer, and professional. Her advice and role modeling in all of these areas has significantly shaped who I have become in both my professional and personal life. A woman of very strong faith, she has always given unselfishly of her time and talents to her church, her family, her community, and her work. She has taught me to lead by example and never be afraid to stand up for what I believe is right.

I find that my faith plays a role in most every decision I make. In the workplace it is important to me to work for a company that values children and families, and to spend my time working on an issue that is for the greater good of society. At home I call on my faith to guide my parenting decisions during challenging times and as an outlet for praise during the proud times. As a wife, my faith provides the foundation for the honor, respect, and commitment to my 16-year marriage. I am grateful to my parents for instilling a strong sense of faith in me—a gift that I can now pass on to my children.

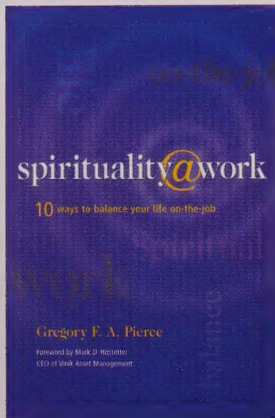
Beth A. Zeilinger is vice president of operations for the National Institute on Media and the Family in Minneapolis, Minn. She resides in Lino Lakes, Minn., with her husband and two sons.



BOOKMARKS

Taking Your Faith to Work

by Linda Post Bushkofsky



Spirituality at Work: Ten Ways to Balance Your Life on-the-Job, Gregory F. A. Pierce. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001. Reviewed by Karen Ball, Oakland, California.

How is your daily work connected to and an expression of your faith in God? It is in the midst of everyday circumstances—changing a diaper, typing a manuscript, preparing a meal, interviewing a client—that we are living out God’s call in our lives. If you wrestle with these ideas, here’s a book you’ll want to consider for your book group or individual reading.

Pierce approaches the question of how to be spiritual in the workplace from an explicitly Christian perspective, but he also describes himself as “piety impaired.” Uncomfortable with displays of religiosity in the workplace, he posits that there is more to spirituality in the workplace than organizing prayer groups or Bible study programs. He clearly understands that many Christians are struggling with the

question, “What does it mean to be a Christian (or any person of faith) in a secular work setting?”

Pierce develops 10 spiritual practices to guide readers who seek to mesh their faith with their work. Some are relatively simple, like surrounding yourself with “sacred” objects or engaging in ongoing personal and professional development. Others are far more difficult, like deciding what is “enough” and sticking to it, or dealing with others as you would have them deal with you. Each chapter is filled with quotes and stories from contributors and readers of Pierce’s email group, Faith and Work in Cyberspace.

For Reflection

1. Which of the 10 practices is the easiest for you in your work setting? Which is the most difficult?
2. How would your relationship to work change if you believed you were working in sacred space? What objects in your office are sacred to you? What sacred objects might you add to your office?

Linda Post Bushkofsky serves as associate synod executive for communication and interpretation for the Synod of Lakes and Prairies, Presbyterian Church. She is a member of Edina Community Lutheran Church in Edina, Minn.



"I remember how a seed was once placed in her hand for safekeeping, all wrapped and protected by a warm and loving handshake."

Keepers of the Seed

by Peggy Smothers Post

IT'S AUTUMN once again, and the air is alive with swirling leaves and the scent of the season. My pockets bulge with newly plucked seeds, holding my hopes for next year's promises.

I have always been a seed-keeper, and now I settle into the task of sorting, counting, and tucking them all carefully into labeled envelopes. I know each one is special and filled with beauty, just waiting for a new season to unfold.

As I muse over my newly acquired wealth, I pause and recall another day that is long since past. On the steps of a white clapboard church, where autumn leaves swirled about, a kindly Lutheran minister shook the hand of a young girl. This simple act was magic, a message that she was welcome and accepted, important and not forgotten.

Each Sunday, the girl would sit in the last pew nearest to the door to assure her place in line. This ritual continued until the kindly minister was gone from her life forever, and the handshakes were never to be had again.

Over the years, there would be many new towns and new places. She would visit other churches, and there would be many other handshakes to be had.

Some would be warming and pleasant, most would be sincere, but none were ever his.

A cool breeze draws me back to the present. I gather my packets of seed and find a snug and protected place to store them lovingly away until the days are warm again. I sit back content, knowing I have kept them safe.

I think back once more to that young girl. I remember how a seed was once placed in her hand for safekeeping, all wrapped and protected by a warm and loving handshake. She watched as it tried to sprout over the years. When conditions were right and it began to emerge, it twisted and turned as the tiny tendrils proved they could weather life's storm.

Now, as I pack away my carefully labeled packets, I am comforted by the knowledge that I have always been a keeper of God's seed.

This Sunday, when you go to church and the autumn leaves swirl about, take the time to shake a child's hand. They may be a seed-keeper, too.

Peggy Smothers Post is a married mother of three and a grandmother of two. She is an active member of St. John's Lutheran Church in St. Donatus, Iowa.

Thanks-Giving Hands

by Lita Brusick Johnson



A Thankoffering Devotion

Leader: Hands will be the focus of today's special thankoffering devotion: God's hands, our hands. Listen to the psalmist's song of praise for all the works of God's hands.

Readers 1 and 2: Readers alternate reading verses of Psalm 104:1-2, 5, 10-15, 24, 27-30.

Leader: This psalm is a wonderful collage of the wondrous works of God's hands. God's holy hands do the heavy building, stretching the heavens like a tent and setting the earth on its foundations. They also do the fine detail work, such as finding singing birds a place to nest. From the cosmic to the commonplace, the works of God's hands are the very substance of our everyday lives.

But we sometimes look at God's handiwork without really seeing. We use God's everyday blessings, but we don't always think to thank God. When was the last time you joined the psalmist in thanking the Lord for making the grass grow? There are hundreds of gifts from God that we see daily and take for granted.

So let's take a moment to call to mind one everyday blessing that we take for granted—one that, when we pause to think about it, is really wonderful. I will then invite you to add yours to the psalmist's list. Let's each pause and reflect on one personal everyday blessing.

Leader: Now let's add our "everyday blessings" to the psalmist's collage of praise!

We thank you, Lord, for everyday things—and for making us capable of seeing them as your handiwork!

We, your creatures, thank you for ... [*go around the circle, each person naming her "everyday blessing"*]. Great are your mighty works—and your little works—O Lord!

Now let's sing together our praise to God, whose open hands fill us with good things.

Hymn: "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee"
(*Lutheran Book of Worship* 551, verses 1-2)

Leader: God made our hands. When was the last time you really looked at your hands? Take a moment and look at them now.

God's hands continue to hold our hands. Remember back to when you were very young, to a time when someone took your hand and pulled you to safety or held your hand to show you a new and amazing thing.

We know that God won't let go of our hands, is ever pulling us to life and hope. Now listen to the story of a girl whose hands touched God's incarnate hands and was pulled from death to life.

Reader 1: Mark 5:21–24a; 35–42.

Leader: There are times when God's goodness seems swallowed up by disease and death, evil and sin. Sorrow eclipses joy, and we know we have neither the resources nor the strength to go it alone. The joys of "chanting bird and flowing fountain" are not enough to sustain us, or to save us. In those times when we begin to doubt God's goodness, we hear Jesus' voice calling us: "Get up!"

We give thanks for a God whose hands reach out to ours, pulling us from death into life, refusing to let go even when fear, anger, or doubt causes us to loosen our grip. We thank God for sending Jesus to walk with us, to redeem us, to bring us hope.

Let's sing our prayer for Jesus' presence with us.

Hymn: "Precious Lord, Take My Hand"

(*With One Voice* 731, verses 1–2)

Leader: Now look at your hands again. [*Short pause.*] Remember a time when you reached out to help or to save—a time when you snatched a child from a busy street; wrote; cooked; made something to help others; or shared with people whose hands were empty, who hungered or were in need. God works amazing and everyday miracles through your hands. You are part of Christ's body—your hands are Christ's hands in the world. Through you, God says to people who have lost hope, "Get up!" Not an arrogant order, but a loving promise of presence and help. Your hands sow seeds of life, hope, and joy in our world. Listen to Paul's description of how this works.

Reader 2: 2 Corinthians 9:8–11.

Leader: God provides "blessing in abundance." We have more than what we need, plenty of "seed corn."

You have heard God's promise: what we sow will be multiplied, yielding a wonderful harvest.

Thanks be to God for our capable, thanks-giving hands—and for God's Spirit, who works through our hands to renew the face of the earth!

Reception of Thankoffering

After the Thankoffering is received, pray together:

Leader: O Lord our God, we thank you for all your mighty works.

People: You open your hands, and we are filled with good things. You take our hands, and we are redeemed, renewed, and restored. You strengthen our hands, and we bring life and hope to our world.

Leader: Lord, we rejoice in your presence and seek to serve you.

People: From our hands, receive these gifts, which we return to you with a joyous and thankful heart. May these gifts bring help and hope to people in great need throughout the world you made.

Leader: May God our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer bless and multiply our gifts—and bless each of us this day and our whole lives through.

People: Amen.

Closing Hymn: "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee" (*LBW* 551, verse 3), or "Lord of All Good" (*LBW* 411, sung to the more familiar tune of "Abide with Me," *LBW* 272)

Lita Brusick Johnson is director of the ELCA World Hunger Appeal.



MOTHERING SEASONS

Lessons in the Baptismal Waters

by Kirsi Stjerna

"I WANT APPLE JUICE!" FOR THE THIRD TIME THAT NIGHT I GOT UP, FRUSTRATED, NOT THINKING PLEASANT THOUGHTS. I WAS THINKING ABOUT ORIGINAL SIN.

I was thinking about it the next morning, too, when my daughter absolutely refused to wear anything but the "pumpkin socks," a pair of old, gaudy Halloween socks that she had been wearing for who knows how many days because they were the only ones that didn't feel "lumpy." Hissing and spitting with fury, she rejected any word of reason and showed amazing resistance to both parents' pleading, threats, ultimatums, and even tears. Her sin and mine. I was painfully aware of how gravely we both were sinning against each other, in word, thought, and deed, in the tumultuous moment of conflict.

Moments like this make me think that St. Augustine was right: There is a certain wickedness we are born with that recurrently emerges, like an alien side or the evil twin, different from our "normal" being. Many theologians, especially in the Lutheran tradition, have underscored this insight of sin to human frailty—and some of them have not been parents! What did they understand of children and their condition before God? Or, perhaps precisely because they did not have children of their own, it was easier for them to name the sin and see it even in the lives of the little ones.

As a parent who absolutely loves her children, I have been tempted to think otherwise, to think "positively." As a pastor who baptizes children, I have had to rethink the theology of sin and grace every time I prepare a family for the sacrament of baptism. Why don't we just bless the child? Why do we need to talk about sin and evil in such a warm ceremony? In awe of the newborn's bright eyes, which seem to tell that they have seen the divine and no evil, I would rather emphasize original blessedness than original sin. And yet, I have tasted the sour fruit of sin, which follows all our lives, especially in our most intimate relationships. I have seen sin, and in a sense, it is a relief to name it. Sin. Sins of parents. Sins of children.

Parenthood has opened my eyes to the concept of sin—as well as grace—like no other experience. Sin is concrete, real, and relational. There's nothing abstract about sin when you talk with parents. Also, I believe the pain, injury, and destruction sin causes (or rather what we cause as sinners) is the gravest in our most loving relationships. It is also where grace and forgiveness abound like nowhere else.

Naming sin gives perspective to family meltdowns. It is not just me failing again as a mother, as a child, as a person, but rather it is me the sinner failing. It is the sinner who has been drowned in grace in baptism. *Simul-simul*, in Latin, simultaneously



the worst parent/child and the perfect parent/child in God's scope of things.

For these reasons, I have come to see a new dimension in baptism. Looking at it from the perspective of parents, we could stress that in parenting we also can rely on the grace given to us in the sacrament. Baptism of our children reminds us that we also have been baptized in the same grace and forgiveness and fortification against evil. Together we falter, together we confess. Together we loll in the same amniotic fluid called grace.

Remembering our baptism invites us to confess that, as parents and children, we have sinned. We find relief if we also realize that we are simultaneously "justified," forgiven, and perfect in God's eyes. God does not take back the grace in which we have been washed. God loves us as utterly as we love our children, and God sees us as perfect as we see our children, even when they scream for apple juice in

the middle of the night and scream that they hate you and you are a "bad mom." Our patience and integrity get tested, but our ultimate bond and passion with our children remains unchanged. Just to think that it's the same in God's relating to us—wow!

This just might be one of the greatest lessons my children have taught me: how God sees and reacts to our faltering and to our being impossible and demanding. Imagining God as a parent relating to us as we relate to our children "for better" is comforting. Imagining God relating to us as we relate to our children "for worse" is startling. Imagining God with the same pain we feel when we sin and our children sin is mind-boggling.

This is why I love baptism.

Kirsi Stjerna is assistant professor of Reformation church history at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, Penn.



IDEANET

Children in Church

PROVIDE A WELCOMING ATMOSPHERE IN CHURCH AND TALK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED THERE WHEN YOU GET HOME—YOU'D BE SURPRISED HOW MUCH EVEN A TODDLER OBSERVES. THE STORY AND IDEA THAT FOLLOW ARE BOTH VERY SPECIAL, AND WE WANT TO SHARE THEM WITH YOU.

Let the Children Come

It was Sunday and we were celebrating Holy Communion. We followed the practice of having the congregation come to the communion rail, one group at a time. I dismissed each group with the communion blessing, concluding with the words “Go in peace.”

After the last group had left the rail, I took communion to a disabled member in the front pew.

Returning to the altar, with my back to everyone but God, I was all set to conclude the service. But the organist wasn't starting the response. Murmurs and titters, rare in this church, spread throughout the congregation. I turned to see my 3-year-old daughter Tanya walking toward me, a certain sternness in her features.

Without a moment's hesitation, she marched up the chancel steps, walked around the altar rail, and came to my side at the altar. I stooped down and put my arm around her. She whispered in my ear, “Daddy, you forgot to tell Mr. Odegaard to go in peace.”

“Let the children come to me, do not stop them,” said Jesus in Mark 10:14. But we leave them at home. Or put them in nurseries. Or make them sit in the back pews. Or run Sunday school at the same time as worship, because after all, they wouldn't understand. God must be busy making millstones.

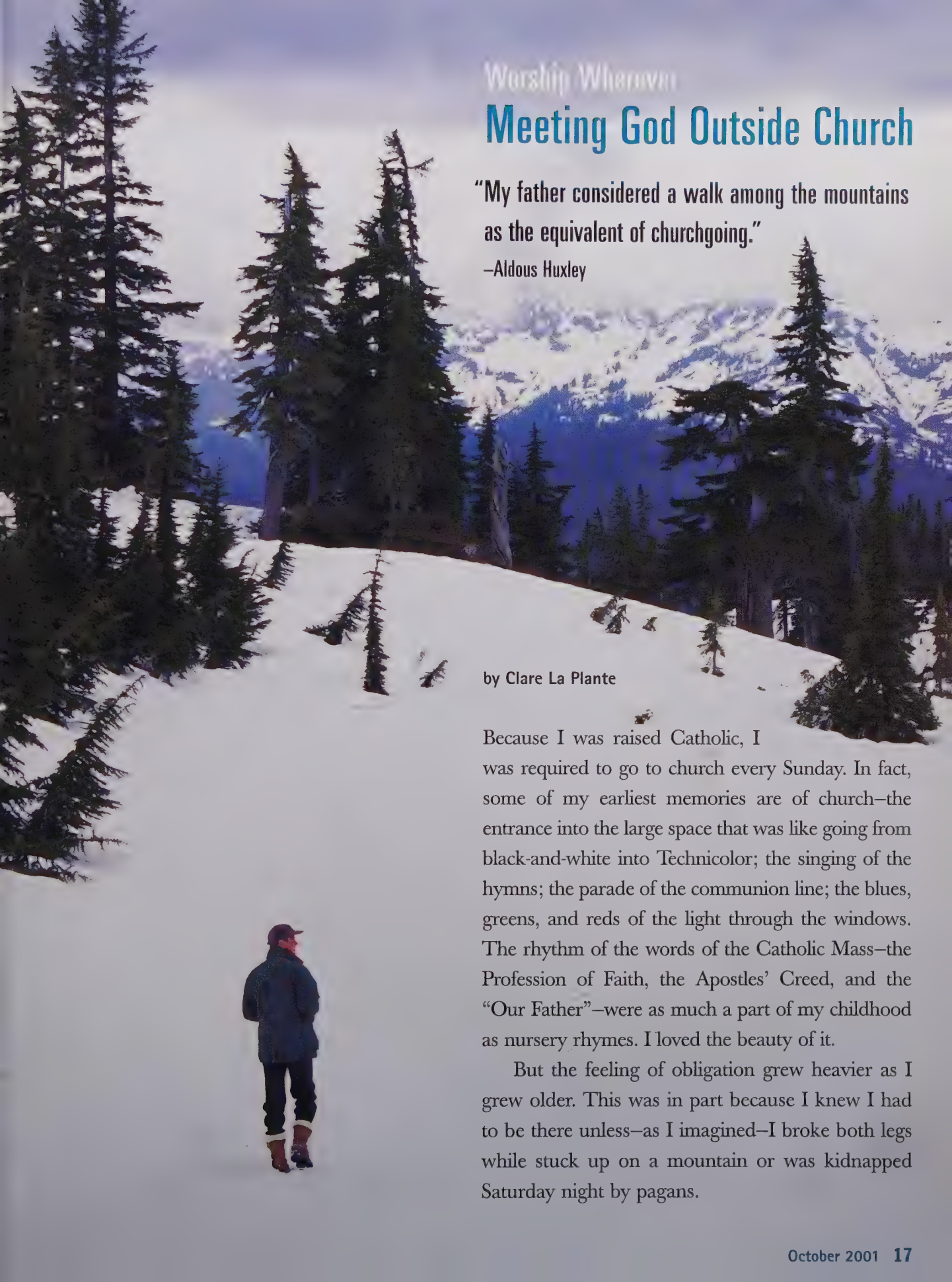
*Terence E. Fretheim—Minneapolis, Minnesota
Luther Seminary*

The Children's Bulletin Board

One idea to help children find the joy is to have a special bulletin-board center where they pick up paper and pencil to record their impressions of worship. After worship they can then post their drawings or writings. To get started, run an article in the church newsletter enlightening parents on how their children can share in worship. Follow this up with a children's sermon explaining the new bulletin board for children to display their worship reflections.

*Dorothy Brokering—Windsor, Colorado
(Dorothy also sent seven marvelous tips for helping children worship.)*

Send email to Faith Fretheim at Fretheim@elca.org or call 800-638-3522, ext. 2736. See page 43 for the next IdeaNet topic. Use the enclosed postcard to send in your idea before November 10.

A photograph of a person standing in a snowy mountain landscape. The person is wearing a dark jacket and a red hat, looking towards the right. The landscape is covered in snow, with several evergreen trees scattered throughout. In the background, there are snow-capped mountains under a clear sky.

Worship Wherever

Meeting God Outside Church

"My father considered a walk among the mountains as the equivalent of churchgoing."

—Aldous Huxley

by Clare La Plante

Because I was raised Catholic, I was required to go to church every Sunday. In fact, some of my earliest memories are of church—the entrance into the large space that was like going from black-and-white into Technicolor; the singing of the hymns; the parade of the communion line; the blues, greens, and reds of the light through the windows. The rhythm of the words of the Catholic Mass—the Profession of Faith, the Apostles' Creed, and the "Our Father"—were as much a part of my childhood as nursery rhymes. I loved the beauty of it.

But the feeling of obligation grew heavier as I grew older. This was in part because I knew I had to be there unless—as I imagined—I broke both legs while stuck up on a mountain or was kidnapped Saturday night by pagans.

The Christian church didn't start this way, wholly dependent (as I was) on a visible house of worship for my own practice. Rather, Christians would set aside sacred spots for "the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). But they would also worship outside those "walls," or spots.

Today, though, through rules, habits, and social necessity, our churches have taken on a life of their own. We might even gain a large part of our identity through them. Catholics even used to describe their neighborhood by the parish to which they belonged.

Our churches also offer a buffer against the isolation in our mobile (and increasingly technological) world. They help us to structure our weeks, our lives. We still find inspiration from sermons and from the group prayer. The songs and symbols live in our collective unconscious.

But if we become, as I did, more focused on the obligation than on the worship itself, the church ceremonies become rote—automatic and obligatory. We lose, in fact, what Bishop T. S. Garrett calls "the essential inwardness of all true worship." It's like hosting a teleconference dinner party.

What's the solution? What we need to do is expand our worship from Sundays into the week—bring it out of the four walls of the church and into

the open. We need to open the gates between the compartments of our lives. This may be difficult because we live in a society that rewards us for compartmentalizing, for being a different person each day. You can pray in church on Sunday and still cut off three cars on the way home.

Worship is really a 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week proposition. We must engage in it all week in order for it to be effective. Otherwise we become the spiritual equivalent of weekend warriors, who sprain their ankles and knees playing sports too hard on the weekends after a week of sloth.

How do you start? Nature helps. It is, as Benjamin Disraeli said, the "art of God." Fly fishers rhapsodize about being in the waters. In the book *A River Runs Through It*, Norman MacLean writes, "Poets talk about 'spots of time,' but it is really fisherman who experience eternity compressed into a moment." Gardeners have it bad, too. Writer Mirabel Osler says that, "At the heart of gardening there is a belief in the miraculous."

So then get thee to a park or wherever it is that you find solace. I began finding it in long walks. Others find worship at the beach, in the rhythm of the waves, the baptism of the surf. Or on hikes through hills, neighborhoods, even busy cities, where you'll see morning worshipers out at the first

PLACES TO WORSHIP WITHOUT WALLS

1. **Walks.** It's not about getting from here to there. Use this as an opportunity to be present. Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh says to "Walk as though you are kissing the earth

with your feet." Or say a prayer, one word per step. Consider starting a walking meditation group with like-minded friends.

2. **Meals.** Don't rush. Set the table. Say grace, even if you're alone. Savor your food, the company. Be grateful.

3. **Morning or evening meditation.** Just 10 minutes when you first wake or before going to sleep can sustain you for an entire day. Carve out this time for yourself each day, stick with it, and even create a space in which to do this—a favorite chair or rug, or even

light of day, when our prayers are the freshest. Humans have been worshiping without walls for ages—it's just been called by different names. The farmer tilling the land to the hymn of the birds; the gardener with her hands in the dirt, a benediction of ashes; or the runner breathing in the incense of trees.

Here's the tricky part: Sometimes this wall-less worship must be done in less than ideal places or times—the parking lot, the expressway at rush hour, the strip mall. You can't afford to wait until conditions are just right. It would be like neglecting your life until you painted the walls of your house the right color.

Ultimately, worship is about building a relationship—with God and with yourself (remember her?). In the book *Our Need to Worship* (Crowley Publications, 1988), Robin Green says, "I have never been happy with the 'normal definition' of worship: i.e. giving worth or respect to God. It has always seemed to me a too limited way of describing what is essentially a dynamic process. I accept that it is to God that ultimate worth is given, but I prefer the definition of 'the mutual giving and receiving of worth.'"

So worship, then, is stepping up to the plate, knowing that you're a part of this mutual giving and receiving. It's the path of the mavericks, saints, and mystics—including Meister Eckart, John of the Cross, St. Theresa—who knew that God is everywhere, and

the opportunity to worship is as present as our breath.

In fact, worshiping outside of church walls is a practice of being present—there's no choir to carry the slack if you doze off or start calculating your 401(k) returns. If part of the point of Jesus' humanity was his ability to feel what we feel as humans feel—fear, rage, love, disappointment—it would be a good idea to allow our worship to include whatever we are at that time, with all the frustration, sadness, yearning, or even boredom. Tell it to God. Hear it in yourself. Realize that prayer is less a pleading than a meeting.

Worship is paradoxical—perhaps in the face of yearning, frustration, and sorrow, something sublimely pleasurable, invigorating, and alive. Worship is not something to cross off your to-do list. It's a transcendental experience—even in the grocery store. Worship, I guess we could say, is an end to itself, wherever you are.

In many ways, it's the ultimate experience of humility and gratitude—sort of our own tithing process. We're putting back into the coffers of our lives. "If the only prayer you say in your whole life is 'thank you,' that would suffice," said Meister Eckart. It's also a lesson in spontaneity—and being who we are at any given moment.

Clare La Plante is a writer and reporter from Chicago.

create an informal "altar," with pictures, flowers, or postcards.

Or get to church 10 minutes earlier than you usually do for a private worship service before the communal one begins.

4. **Cars.** Yes, even crawling along in rush-hour traffic can become a sublime experience if you strike the right attitude during a commute. First of all, consider incorporating mementos in your car to remind you that it can be a sacred space—a cross,

a picture, or even a ribbon hung from your rearview mirror. Play inspiring tapes or CDs. And then pray, breathe, or just wish good things to the other drivers, even the one who cut you off at the exit ramp.

Lutheran Vespers and the Silver Tea Set



by Katherine Richey Johnson

Every few weeks I polish my silver tea set during Lutheran Vespers. I'm not really a silver person; I'm more of an earthenware person. But my mother is a "silver" person—and I don't mean just her hair.

My mother has a natural gift for hospitality. Visitors sense the welcome and immediately feel at peace in her home, where they enjoy arrangements of fresh flowers and tasty assortments of foods. Although my mother has always been very loving and supportive, I suspect that she secretly wishes I were more of a "silver" type like her.

Being an optimistic person, she presented my husband and I with a complete silver tea service for our 25th wedding anniversary—certainly an appropriate gift for the silver anniversary. Because it is from my beloved mother, who visits regularly, it is on display. It has even been used once or twice in the 10 years we have had it. But mostly it sits in gradually fading splendor until I finally notice the layer of tarnish. This awareness becomes keener when I hear that mother is to visit soon.

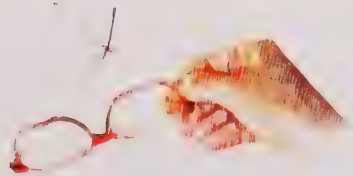
That's how I happened to discover that the half-hour while I listen to Lutheran Vespers is just the right amount of time for polishing the silver tea set.

I turn up the radio and proceed to apply polish and rinse the brown away while pondering baptism or death or a multitude of other topics with Walter Wangerin Jr.

Some may see this as sacrilegious, but for me it is an act of devotion. It is the one thing I can do to honor my mother's wish. No matter how hard I try, the floral arranging and entertaining will never come easy for me. But I can keep the tea set that she chose with such care in splendid condition.

While I am fed with the delicacies from Walter's table, I care for the silver. This ministration is not done out of pride for a worldly possession, but rather with respect for a mother who will always see me through eyes of hope born in love. Somehow, I think Walter would understand.

Katherine Richey Johnson serves on staff at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Wash. She is married to an ELCA chaplain.



READER CALL

Meaningful Worship Experiences

We had the pleasure of living in England for four years. Our visit to Westminster Abbey in London was one of my favorite experiences.

While we were visiting, we heard an announcement inviting everyone to a Eucharistic service. We made our way through the crowds to the worship area.

As we approached the rail for communion, I thought about the royalty, world leaders, and other prominent Christians who had knelt there before God to share in the body and blood of our Lord. As I received that precious gift, I realized that we are equal in the eyes of our Father. His children are welcome at his feast of victory. Thanks be to God.

Peggy Hoppes—Jacksonville, Arkansas

Only the vigil candle lightened the darkened sanctuary as we entered in silence. The last of the vigil keepers were just leaving. We began with the litany, then read psalms and scriptures in unison. Then, all was silent. At a prearranged signal precisely at midnight, all the lights came on, momentarily blinding the worshipers.

"Christ is risen!" intoned the presider.

"Christ is risen indeed!" came the joyous response.

We removed the black drapes from the altar, lectern, and hanging cross. We carried lilies in to adorn the chancel and greeted each other again with the glad news of the Resurrection. We sang hymns of celebra-

tion and prayers of thanksgiving. Joy filled the room.

It's been more than 20 years since that night. On Christmas Eve, churches are filled to overflowing. On Easter Eve, we barely had the equivalent of the Jewish minyan. Perhaps that made it even more special. There were, after all, only three women to whom the good news was first revealed. When I think of the most memorable worship event, I relive the excitement of that night.

Rosemary Sinniger—Pennington, New Jersey

Our congregation traditionally observes Lent with weekly dramas. Through these dramas, I have seen Jesus' Lenten journey from a new perspective. I have lost my anger and frustration at those who killed him and instead have awe and gratitude for the One who allowed it to happen out of love for all sinners.

Confusion over Jesus' quiet response, "You say that I am" (the king of the Jews), has been replaced with understanding that any other response may have altered the inevitable outcome. Hatred for Judas has been replaced with sympathy for the unfortunate one chosen for the necessary task that would make him so despised.

Yes, Lent is now an experience I look forward to. Without it there can be no triumphant Easter alleluias.

Linda Harriz—Simpsonville, South Carolina

IT'S NOT UNCOMMON TO HEAR THE WORD HOLY

USED IN A FLIPPANT, OFFHAND WAY, AS IN "HOLY COW" OR "HOLY SMOKE."

OUR CULTURE SEEMS TO HAVE LOST SOME SENSE

THAT THERE IS ANYTHING BIGGER THAN US,

ANYTHING WE CAN'T CONTROL WITH OUR WORDS OR OUR TECHNOLOGY.

IN CONTRAST, GOD'S HOLINESS IS SOMETHING UNCONTROLLABLE

AND PERHAPS ONLY PARTLY DEFINABLE, BUT STILL WORTH CONTEMPLATING.

WHAT'S H^OLY?

by Karen Burgess-Cassler



SOME years ago I had an acquaintance who, in her search for a different home, looked at many, many houses for sale in and near her town. She and her husband could not find any that they liked. The yards were too small or had too many trees, or the neighborhoods weren't nice enough. To meet their criteria, they finally decided to have a new house built, in a fairly upscale new subdivision.

As the house was nearing completion, my acquaintance began talking about it in a different way. "This is a sacred place," she'd say, or, "We don't want to profane it in any way." Finally, when they had moved in, she said she wanted only "really spiritual" people to come inside the house, because it was so "holy."

Soon after this, she began to urge me to invite her and her family to my home for dinner, saying, "We always have a good time at your place." Her contrast between our ordinary house and their holy house really struck me as odd.

What was "holy" about that house? What makes a person "spiritual" enough to be welcome, anywhere? Why was the idea of holiness used as an opportunity for exclusivity?

HOLINESS COMES FROM GOD,

NOT FROM ANYTHING WE CHOOSE OR DO

OR ANY RULES WE FOLLOW.

It led me to ask myself, What do we mean when we describe a person, place, or thing as "holy"? My acquaintance meant a place that is separate, in some way different from the common things of life. In this she was actually consistent with the idea of holiness in the Bible. Holy things, holy people, and holy places are set apart from what is commonplace.

Think of Moses at the burning bush, meeting God for the first time: "Do not come near; put off

your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5, Revised Standard Version). That's God talking! Moses' reaction? "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God" (verse 6). Holiness, here, brings not comfort but panic. We're not sitting in the park admiring nature but stuck on the railroad tracks hearing the train whistle blow.

The same kind of terror and awe before God's power shows up in other stories, too. The Ark of the Covenant, for example, was a sign of God's presence (Exodus 25:10–22), and ordinary people kept their distance from it (Joshua 3:4). When Moses and the people were at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19), God's presence came with thunder and lightning, trumpet blasts, thick clouds, and the threat of death to anyone who touched the mountain.

In Isaiah 6 we read of the prophet's vision of God's glory and holiness—the angels' song gives us the "Holy, holy, holy" we sing each week—and again, the reaction is shame and fear. "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips ... for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (verse 5, RSV).

In these instances, what is holy is set apart

because it's connected with God. The point is never the thing itself, but the fact that God's name or presence is there, too. What my friend with the "holy house" didn't understand is that holiness comes from God, not from anything we choose or do or any rules we follow.

The big story in the Bible is that God—"beyond us" in every way—chooses a covenant relationship first with the people of Israel, and later, through

Jesus, with us. Many places in scripture, especially in Isaiah, God is called the “Holy One of Israel”—the transcendent God (Holy One) who has chosen a relationship of committed love with the people (of Israel). They become holy, receiving some of God’s holiness because of this relationship.

As it did for the people of Israel, God’s holiness can bring us death—and new birth. In baptism, whether of an adult or a tiny baby, we sometimes glimpse the new life in which we all participate. We do renounce “all the forces of evil, the devil, and all his empty promises” (*Lutheran Book of Worship* page 123). We place the newly baptized person, and ourselves, willingly into the sphere of God’s loving

of God’s energy to create, to heal, to suffer, and to welcome. God’s own self lives in us. This can complicate our lives as we welcome the stranger, visit the sick person, or cradle a loved one who is dying. God’s holiness in our lives can be unpredictable and messy. It might even cross some of the boundaries we have put up in our lives. Sometimes it’s tempting to focus on following moral rules. But as God’s holy people, we are called to live freely in God’s promise, “at the same time saint and sinner,” trusting God’s constant care for us, no matter what.

And what is a “holy place”? Anywhere God meets us. For some of us this will be empty or isolated places, like St. Anthony’s Egyptian desert.

AND WHAT IS A “HOLY PLACE”? ANYWHERE GOD MEETS US.

power. We have been touched by God’s overwhelming life and strength, before which we all stand defenseless and naked. We welcome each new sister or brother as an equal, a companion, a “fellow [member] of the body of Christ, [child] of the same heavenly Father, and [worker] with us in the kingdom of God” (*LBW*, page 125). In our baptism we share Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, and become part of the Body of Christ, Christ’s life in the world.

In 1 Peter 2:9 we read, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (RSV). These words echo Exodus 19, the covenant God makes with Israel at Sinai. This is why we sometimes hear, “Holy things for holy people,” as an invitation to receive the Lord’s Supper. God has made us a holy people, part of the communion of saints.

How do we declare God’s wonderful deeds? We speak, act, and live in the world carrying a bit

But God also comes to meet us wherever the means of grace are—Word, sacraments, and the “mutual conversation and consolation of the [sisters and] brothers.” Because God has healed us and made us holy, we embody God’s grace for one another.

This is part of what makes hospitality important—not just how we can serve other people, but what God gives us through them when we welcome them. St. Benedict talks about receiving every guest “like Christ,” especially the poor and pilgrims, “because it is especially in them that Christ is received.” We welcome others as Christ, because he has first welcomed us and made us holy. Even in the common and ordinary places in our lives, we share the very holiness of God.

Karen Burgess-Cassler is a member of the Lutheran Deaconess Conference and of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church in Vancouver, Wash.

Shaping Future

WORSHIP

Many congregations have begun weaving new styles of music and alternate texts into their worship.

Others are incorporating drama and liturgical dance. Still others are enriching their worship through the use of multimedia resources and other visual arts.

Innovation and adaptation in worship is not new. The church has adapted patterns for worship from the beginning. The New Testament gives us the basic narrative for the ritual act that defines us as Christians—the meal shared with the disciples in the upper room. But everything that surrounds that central action was shaped by other styles of prayer and ritual used at the time. Our pattern of public reading from our sacred texts and psalms, and teaching on those texts, has its roots in the pattern of worship and teaching that was emerging in the synagogues at the time of Jesus. Our prayers of thanksgiving and blessing have their origins in Jewish meal celebrations.

As a part of the church catholic, the ELCA is heir to a rich tapestry of worship resources, ranging from the *Didache* (late first century) and the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (third century), to Luther's *Formula Missae* (1523), the *Common Service* (1888), and *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978).

WHERE WE'RE GOING

New trends continue to emerge in worship, trends that, though new, have their roots in things very ancient. As Leonard Sweet writes in his book *Postmodern Pilgrims*, church life and worship in the 21st century will need to be “e.p.i.c.,” meaning “experiential, participatory, image-centered, and connected.”

Generations born since 1960 embrace the Christian tradition, but they understand it through their own unique experience, which is of a postmodern, post-Christian society. Churches are discovering that to engage these generations, they must

The Art of Style

by Deb Bogaert

become more open to eclecticism, drawing from the practices of the early church, the Reformation, and evangelical and contemporary traditions. Future worship will likely take shape around these characteristics:

- greater and fuller use of ritual
- more use of and deeper appreciation for symbolism
- more spaces for quiet contemplation
- more frequent celebration of communion
- high participation
- convergence of musical styles and a variety of instruments
- greater appreciation of the Christian year as setting a pattern and rhythm to our spirituality

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL

We are all joined in the larger church of all times and places, the communion of saints throughout the ages and wherever we are in the present. The larger church is not bound by time, place, language, culture, or style. As part of this larger church, we look to what has come before as well as to the unique circumstances of our own time, place, and culture. Adapting our tradition is to continue the evolution that has been going on for centuries.

Honoring tradition does not mean that we stagnate. Quite the contrary: Tradition must always be adapted, in order for us to successfully do what we are entrusted to do—pass down the substance and core of our tradition to the next generations. We are entrusted with a commitment to Word and Sacrament, biblical texts, and congregational song. These are the vital links; language and musical styles evolve and change.

WORSHIP AS SENSORY EXPERIENCE

We cannot simply transform and rearrange everything about worship, but many aspects of our worship are open to possible variation. Our tendency in the West is to make worship a verbose experience—all language and speaking. Our approach to worship is often too intellectual, leaving little room for imagination, emotion, and involvement of the entire body and all the senses.

Sight is the most active of the senses, yet in worship it tends to be underutilized. During the Middle Ages this was reversed: worship was so incomprehensible to the ear that the visual was pushed to the forefront, with the elevation of the Eucharist being the one moment that worshipers really understood. Our sense of smell is almost completely unused in worship, and our sense of touch is undervalued as well. Our bodies do little more than stand and sit in unison and shuffle to and from communion.

Our approach to worship is often too intellectual, leaving little room for imagination, emotion, and involvement of the entire body and all the senses.

MUSIC, THE WORLD, AND WORSHIP

The distinctions between traditional and contemporary worship often boil down to musical style. Because the church exists as part of the larger world, we cannot ignore the impact of popular musical styles on music for worship. When we realize that most people filling our churches spend only one hour a week with the musical style encountered in worship, we know that we cannot discount their musical experiences during the rest of the week. Although it is true that the church's musical heritage is strong and should not be abandoned, what truly defines Lutheran music for worship is that it belongs to the congregation.

Aside from being an art form, socially, music serves as a unifying element. Groups of a particular

age, background, class, or common interest at times use music as a way to define themselves, a means of differentiating and disassociating themselves from one another. Music is also a way to help people explore their entire range of emotions. The rituals of the church and the liturgical calendar touch many emotions, and music is one avenue for drawing them out. The challenge for congregations is to pass on to successive generations the best of their heritage of music for worship while bypassing short-lived trends.

We live in a society driven by individual tastes, but nowhere in our worship books does individual taste come into play—not the taste of the pastor, the musicians, or the donor who financed the new organ. None of these determines what will be the repertoire for worship, though often enough, they do. The musicians' belief that because they are responsible for the music, their taste should be gratified; the pastor's belief that the music should be a particular way because, well, he or she is the pastor; or the belief that certain voices are more equal than others due to their prominence in the congregation, longevity, or ability to make their opinions heard. How do we make informed, well-balanced choices?

WHAT GOOD CHURCH MUSIC IS

Four criteria help determine whether a piece of music is appropriate for worship. First, it should be musical: the melodies are accessible, singable, and within a typical range for congregational singing. Second, it should be liturgical: the text is appropriate to liturgical and sacramental celebration, and is able to integrate with the liturgical action it accompanies. Third, it should be pastoral: the music must effectively serve the needs of the congregation, motivating them to

action leading from their prayer. And finally, music for worship should reflect the diversity of the church.

Those who choose music for worship must not only pay attention to the liturgical season and the tastes and preferences of the community, but they must also realize the limits of range, the complexity of each piece, and its format. Attention also should be paid to how a particular piece of music might challenge, stretch, enrich, form, or re-form worshipers. Acknowledging that music inspired by faith in Jesus Christ comes from a tremendous variety of nations and cultures, not to mention centuries of developments and innovations in how we worship, can help a congregation move beyond the limits of its own tastes, heritage, and geography and into an appreciation and understanding of the richness of the universal church.

**The rituals of
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them out.**

CHARTING THE COURSE

The so-called traditional and contemporary worship styles are not mortal enemies. Instead, their existence reflects the human tension of experiencing the God of Jesus Christ—who promises ultimate reconciliation and mediation of all the apparent contradictions in our lives and in the world. Together, each serves the proclamation of the gospel and the building of the kingdom. For this to happen, our navigation of the waters of traditional and contemporary styles must be marked by humility and respect for the struggle for faith, the recognition that God's ways are not our ways, and that my ways may not be another's ways.

Deb Bogaert, *LWT's* managing editor, has a background in liturgical theology and is an experienced liturgical musician.



Liturgy

A Gift of Connections

by Craig M. Mueller

When someone starts singing “Happy Birthday,” almost everyone can join in. Fireworks on July 4, turkey at Thanksgiving, and a tree at Christmas are other customs familiar to most people in the United States. Our lives are marked by a variety of rituals and traditions that connect us to the past or to common ways of celebrating civic, familial, or religious holidays.

Rituals such as these usually consist of practices that we repeat year after year. These repeated practices give rituals the ability to play a deep and significant role in our lives: Our rituals derive meaning from the associations from past observances that we bring into the observance at hand. Each celebration of Christmas, for example, is filled with memories of the people, places, and circumstances that marked previous Christmases. We may remember how Christmas was observed in our childhood, or how a particular year was influenced by sorrow or joy.

Looking at Tradition

When we gather for Sunday worship, we become connected to Christians throughout the ages and around the world who share the same basic pattern of liturgy that we use. If we define tradition as something of worth from the past given to us as a



gift for our present lives, then in this sense our worship is deeply rooted in tradition. One theologian calls tradition the “living faith of the dead.”

Some congregations use the terms “traditional” and “contemporary” to describe the two different kinds of worship services

that may be offered on Sunday morning. The traditional service may use organ and *Lutheran Book of Worship*; the contemporary service may use piano, guitar, or other instruments, as well as a variety of sources. In some places it's the musical style that most distinguishes a traditional service

from a contemporary one. Yet these terms can be misleading, since worship has and should have elements that connect us both to tradition (the past) and to the contemporary (those things relevant to our everyday lives). Even if we look at music alone, we are all richer when we enjoy a variety of musical styles and songs. Can you imagine not singing traditional hymns, such as “Silent Night, Holy Night!” or “Jesus Christ Is Risen Today,” or contemporary favorites, such as “Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ” or “Gather Us In”?

Every congregation has its own way of doing things. Parish traditions may involve the way communion is distributed or how the church is decorated for Christmas or Easter. On a broader scale, we may also view as tradition the general patterns of recent practices in North America or the past practices from the Reformation period in Germany or Scandinavia. Most often, though, we find that there is much more diversity of liturgical expression than we might have thought.

We often make assumptions based on our lifetime experience and our experience in our own congregation, yet these are not always complete or universal. For example, someone may make a

blanket statement that Lutherans don't have kneelers in their churches or that they don't have crucifixes, yet these statements are not true. Within Lutheranism there are many and varied strands of tradition and practice. If you think of tradition as a tapestry composed of many threads, there are many possibilities when selecting which threads will be pulled to the surface.

Ecumenical Connections

During the past several decades, Christians of many denominations have come to a kind of ecumenical consensus regarding many worship practices and ritual texts. Additionally, scholars have looked to the first several centuries of the church to note the origins and emergence of traditions and patterns that are central to Christian worship to this day. Thus, the current liturgies of Lutherans, Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians, and other denominations are remarkably similar. When we gather for worship, we not only share a deep connection to Christians through the ages but also with Christians throughout the world.

When we have a broad view of tradition, we are able to look beyond our own congregation, or

even Lutheranism. After all, it was not Martin Luther's intent to begin a new denomination but instead to be a reforming movement within the catholic church. To be *catholic* means to be connected to the one, holy, universal, and apostolic church through the ages. Unfortunately, in the past the term *catholic* meant Roman Catholic to some. For some Lutherans it had a negative connotation. Many of the practices thought of as catholic, such as making the sign of the cross, kneeling, and celebrating communion weekly, are shared by the majority of the world's Christians, notably the Orthodox, Anglicans, and Roman Catholics.

Sunday Connections

The basic tradition we share with Christians around the world is the Sunday morning liturgy centered in Word and Meal—the proclamation of scripture and the celebration of Holy Communion. The general order and many of the texts are the same. So even if we attend a service in another language or another tradition, we are able to follow the basic flow and outline of the service. The primary texts of the liturgy have been used by Christians for centuries. They include the following, which

many Christians have said or sung throughout their lives:

- Kyrie eleison (Lord, Have Mercy)
- Glory to God in the highest ...
- Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might ...
- Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world ...
- The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds

The liturgical calendar, sometimes called the “church year,” is another tradition Christians have shared throughout the ages. The seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, and Easter have themes and customs that deepen the spiritual lives of us all. For example, during Advent we are reminded of our human longings and hopes, and at Christmas we celebrate the mystery of God's sharing our humanity in Christ. When we light the candles on the Advent wreath, receive ashes on our forehead, or carry a palm in procession, we are partaking in traditions with a long history. The rhythm of the liturgical calendar is a gift from ages past that meets us anew in the unique context of our contemporary world and present-day lives.

We also share in common the cycle of scripture readings, or

lectionary, appointed for Sundays and festivals. Lutherans and most mainline Protestants use a lectionary based on a three-year cycle of readings produced by the Roman Catholic Church in the 1960s. Check with your Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Methodist friends on a given Sunday, and—depending on some denominational or congregational variances—it is likely that you heard the same readings in church and maybe even a sermon on the same theme.

Occasionally someone will say that young people do not respond to ritual or tradition and that they only like contemporary music. This is not true! The human family has great diversity in tastes and styles regardless of age, and the same is true in worship. Thankfully, Christian denominations and, yes, even congregations within the ELCA, express their worship in many different ways.

Body Connections

My own congregation is made up of many people in their 20s and 30s who are drawn to the riches of our liturgical tradition. Our worship service uses all five senses to reveal how God is made known in our bodies and in all of human experience. We see the assembly of people, color, movement, and

the many symbols of our faith. We hear scripture, sermon, music, and even silence. We taste the bread and wine of the Eucharist. We smell the sweet fragrance of incense and occasionally the scent of flowers. We touch one another at the sharing of peace and as we receive communion.

Our bodies are also involved in the many gestures of the liturgy. We make the sign of the

We are connected to Christians of ages past and to our sisters and brothers in Christ around the world.

cross in remembrance of our baptism. We bow toward the altar, cross, or even each other to honor the presence of Christ among us. We stand, sit, or kneel at various points in the liturgy, and we participate in processions as signs of our baptismal journey.

These rich aspects of the liturgy help make the connection between our bodies and the ancient yet ever-new truth of the incarnation: God-with-us, made flesh in Jesus Christ. When we

pray and participate with our bodies, we ourselves become signs of the incarnation and bearers of the Word made flesh.

In the Eucharist we share and become the body and blood of Christ, and then we are sent out the door to share and become the gospel in our daily lives. We become the body of Christ in the world as we live out our baptismal vocation, serving God in whatever situations and circumstances we find ourselves.

The liturgy is a gift to us, and it is all about connections. We are connected to Christians of ages past and to our sisters and brothers in Christ around the world. Our liturgy is both traditional and contemporary, old and new. The gestures and symbols of worship make spiritual connections between our hearts, minds, and bodies. And finally, there is the great and final connection: we are sent into the world to bear witness to all we have seen and heard!

Craig M. Mueller is pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Chicago, and has been an occasional writer and workshop leader in the areas of liturgy and spirituality. He received training in spiritual direction through the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation.



A HEAVY METAL

CHRISTIAN?

by Debbie Lecki

When you put the words “heavy” and “metal” together, people often conjure up images of leather-clad youth filled with angst, drawing pentagrams on the floor, and chanting satanic rituals. If there was ever a genre of music that could elicit collective cringes of displeasure from the mainstream population, heavy metal earned that honor decades ago.

Talk about getting a bad rap.

Heavy metal was blamed for a young man’s suicide because he listened to “Beyond the Realms of Death,” by Judas Priest. AC/DC’s “Night Stalker” was supposed to have inspired Richard Ramirez to murder. And heavy-metal rocker Ozzy Osbourne gave grizzly new meaning to “biting your

head off” when he disassociated a bat’s head from its body during one of his concerts.

It leaves a bad taste in your mouth—and the lyrics to those songs! When you can understand them, they communicate death, destruction, sex, drugs, cheating, etc. Who in their right mind listens to this? Certainly no respectable Christian.

For years I have endured the stereotyping of and listened to the comments about being a heavy metalist from a number of people. “That’s not music, it’s noise.” “It gives me a headache.” “Are you into drugs and devil worship, too?” Because that’s what heavy-metal fans are into—drugs and devil worship, right? Wrong!

I'm a heavy-metal fanatic! I love to wear black. And none of these things makes me a bad Christian, a devil worshiper, or a drug user.

My faith is the most important and most valuable thing to me. Without God's love and never-ending source of strength, I would not be where I am today. I can remember bombarding my mother with questions about religion, God, and the "whys" of life—and she fielded those questions with patience and understanding. She laid the groundwork for my deep faith.

Then how on earth can I listen to that garbage known as heavy metal? Isn't that a sign that a person is losing their faith? Or maybe they're being lead astray by the dark forces? Although it's true that a lot of heavy-metal lyrics reflect those topics mentioned earlier, so do the lyrics of other types of music. Lyrical musings—no matter what emotion they invoke—cause a person to ponder what the writer and/or singer are communicating. You may not like what the message is, but I would posit that you also shouldn't dismiss an entire musical category based on a few bad apples. Get to the core—what are the positives about this music?

I enjoy it because it's fun and energetic; there really are some amazing and talented musicians playing those instruments. Many of them have even been inspired by classical composers such as Bach and Beethoven. Others have noted blues artists, such as Muddy Waters and Buddy Guy, as their sources of inspiration. And when those metal guitarists rip into one of their solos, it is pure energy. It comes from the heart.

Heavy metal is raw and from the gut. Heavy metal is inspirational. One of my favorite metal songs, "You've Got Another Thing Comin'," by Judas Priest, speaks to me about not giving up, about fighting for what I want. To the unconditioned ear, this music may seem to be just noise. Admittedly, I think some metal is just that—noise. But before you put your earplugs in, I would ask you to give it a listen—a fair listen.

What does all this have to do with faith or God? Plenty! Like many youth and a fair number of adults, I'm happy to say that I enjoy heavy metal. Like me, these folks are good Christians. The sad part is that metal is automatically associated with evil and the dark side. In addition to Christian heavy-metal artists who sing God's praises through their guitar wailing, there are many

mainstream artists who tell great stories in a very unique way. In Queensryche's "Operation: Mindcrime," the singer and musicians take you through a troubled young man's life as he gets mixed up with the persuasive and corrupt Dr. X. Tune in to find out what happens.

Christian artists such as Tourniquet, Precious Death, and Stryper all use their music to spread God's word. Their messages are very strong and positive, and they play their guitars just as loud as the mainstreamers.

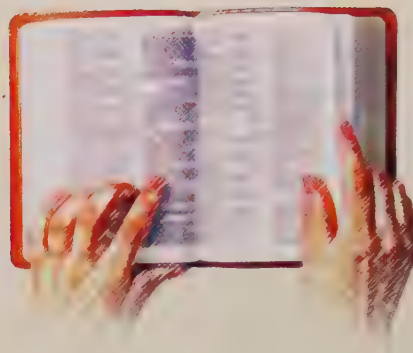
Like many things today, heavy metal is subjected to the trap of stereotyping. I would encourage you to step outside the box and not lump all heavy-metal listeners into a negative category. It may not be your cup of tea, but that doesn't make it distasteful to others. And try not to take it so seriously. Heavy-metal artists have been known to poke fun at their own stereotypes.

God loves all of us—even us metalists. Hmmm . . . is that "Stairway to Heaven" I hear in the background?

When Debbie Lecki isn't ripping out a power solo on her air guitar, she can be found teaching software applications to the folks at The Lutheran Center in Chicago.

Session 2

Praying for the Word



by James Arne Nestingen

Study Text

Isaiah 55:8–12

The First Petition

Hallowed be your name.

What is this?

Answer: It is true that God's name is holy in itself, but we ask in this prayer that it may also become holy in and among us. (From Luther's *Small Catechism*)

How does this come about?

Answer: Whenever the Word of God is taught clearly and purely and we, as God's children, also live holy lives according to it. To this end help us, dear Father in heaven! However, whoever teaches and lives otherwise than the Word of God teaches, dishonors God's name among us. Preserve us from this, heavenly Father! (From Luther's *Small Catechism*)

Memory Verse

"So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11)

Overview

Having called out to God in the introduction to the Lord's Prayer, in the First Petition we ask God to break through all the confusion and speak to us. God's word is unlike any other; it does what it says.

Opening

"God's Word is our great heritage And shall be ours forever; To spread its light from age to age Shall be our chief endeavor. Through life it guides our way; In death it is our stay. Lord, grant while time shall last Your Church may hold it fast Throughout all generations." ("God's Word Is Our Great Heritage," Lutheran Book of Worship 239)

Holy, Holy, Holy

Sometimes the word *holy* gets used in unholy ways, to express surprise or shock—as if cows ("Holy cow!") had anything to do with holiness. Other times, the word *holy* has a pinched-up frown, the knowing sneer of the really righteous. But for all its misuse, holiness is very much a down-to-earth quality.

1. **In Jeremiah 17:22–23, the prophet describes what it takes for the people of Judah to keep the Sabbath holy. What does the text say is required? How do they make the day true to its purpose?**

Naming a Name

Sometimes names are just labels, words tacked on to someone or something just to keep track of them. But when a child is named after someone—perhaps a grandparent or friend of the family—those who know the namesake and the named can tell you right away what makes the name so important. The name tells you something of the person.

In the Old Testament, a person's name describes that person's character. In Genesis 35:10, God changes Jacob's name to Israel. The name Jacob means "he who cheats or supplants."

2. **Read Genesis 27. What did Jacob do to deserve his name?**
3. **The name Israel means "God-centered." With this name, God redefines Jacob, putting him in the relationship God intended for him. In Genesis 35:11–12, God shows the basis of this renaming. What is it?**

Another great Bible story is God calling Moses out of the burning bush. It shows a basic difference between the usual naming and God's name. The whole story is told in Exodus 3:1–15, and the name comes up in verses 13–15.

4. **Given the way biblical names work, what is Moses asking for when he seeks God's name? Why might this be important to him?**

The name God reveals to Moses—"Jehovah" in the King James Bible, "Yahweh" in contemporary translations—means "I am who I am" or "I will be who I will be." With it, God refuses Moses' request, remaining in mystery. All the name says is this: "God is." It is holy in this way; it serves to protect God's true identity. But in Exodus 3:15, God is identified in another way so that Moses will be able to tell the Israelites who is at work on their behalf.

5. **How is God identified to Moses in Exodus 3:15? Remembering the stories that have gone before, what does this identity tell you about God?**

In the Bible, one of the fascinating characteristics of God is "hiddenness." God's holy name becomes a hiding place, disclosing little.

God doesn't break things wide open and appear directly. One reason for this is God's "otherness"—God is not like us.

Life has its hardships and troubles. We can find these hard edges in the stories of the biblical families as well as in our own, where our eyes get covered and God is hidden from us.

6. **Where do the hard edges appear in the story of Abraham and Sarah, or in the story of Jacob and Rachel? Where are the hard edges for you? What can a person cling to in the face of such hiddenness from God?**

Now take a good look at Hebrews 1:1–3. In the New Testament, God is named to Christians in a different way, through God's Son, Christ Jesus.

7. **Give an example of a story about Jesus in which he challenges, corrects, or denounces someone or something. What does this tell you about God? What are some stories where Jesus' goodness or kindness shows through? What does this tell you about God's heart?**

The Name and the Word

In Exodus 4 and Hebrews 1, as in many other passages, the scriptures put together God's name and word. Finally, God's name is an impenetrable mystery; God remains hidden to us behind a veil of holiness, our own eyes covered by our struggles. But God speaks, and when God speaks, things happen.

Isaiah 55:8–11 begins with a statement of God's mystery: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways"—and then moves us to the point where God, in all of

the differences, meets us head-on in the word. Because it is God's word, because God is the speaker, it has power.

This is one of the big differences between God and us. Often our words are futile and useless. But there are times when human words really do have the power to hurt or to help others.

8. **What are some hurtful words? What are some helpful words?**

The prophet Isaiah tells us that God's words are never futile or empty, that they accomplish what God wants and succeeds in what God intends. Already, the Bible stories we've looked at show how it works.

9. **What did God's word do to Jacob? To Moses? What happened to people when Jesus spoke the word?**

Praying for the Word

On the basis of these and many other biblical passages, Martin Luther explains the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer. The holiness of God's name doesn't depend on our prayers any more than it depends on our attitudes or commitments—it is "holy in itself." We are praying, rather, that God's name will work the way it is supposed to work, "among us," or better yet, "for us."

If God's word is going to work, it has to come home to us. It does this in three ways. The first is in Christ, the Word of God made flesh. God's word in Christ comes to us, second, in the Bible. The entire Bible is the word of God because it describes who God is and

what we can expect from God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself promises that the word will come home to us in a third way.

10. **Read Luke 10:16 and Romans 10:6–8, when Paul also sets out Jesus’ promise. What is this promise?**
11. **This promise has already been fulfilled for you countless times. Who are some people who have spoken God’s word to you?**

Discerning the Word

Knowing that God’s word never returns empty, we can be certain that in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, God will continue to speak, bringing it home through the spoken word and the sacraments. But it is also possible to wonder, to doubt, or to fear that God is not speaking.

Among sinners, not every word that claims to be God’s word is in fact just that. People spread all kinds of ideas, theories, and plans, many of them claiming to be the last word in one way or another. When opinions are offered in the place of God’s word, there’s trouble.

12. **Given the ways that God is expressed to us, how do we know when God’s word is being spoken in its “truth and purity”?**

Living contrary to God’s word is not something people deliberately choose to do. Rather, it’s a matter of being lulled away, one thing just leading to another. Then, not really realizing what has happened, a person gets caught up in the self, unable to hear the word of God.

13. **What does it mean to live contrary to God’s word?**

Instead of telling us to take matters into our own hands, Jesus teaches us to fold our hands. In the First Petition, we ask that God’s name will work the way it should among us—that God will speak to us, defining our lives by his speaking, and that he will protect us against false words that would lead us away in our own or others’ opinions.

Prayer Partners

Jesus said, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20), bringing the promise of the spoken word as close as your prayer partner or the small group with whom you pray. But there is a danger in the intimacy, too—prayer partners and prayer chains sometimes feature such powerful sharing that sharing is all that happens. Then God’s word gets passed over in favor of small talk.

Looking Ahead

Think about ways you can work with a prayer partner or your group to keep God’s answer to the petition “Hallowed be your name” at the basis of your conversations.

James Arne Nestingen is professor of church history at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

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Travel and Transformation SEEING WOMEN THROUGH NEW EYES

by Doris Strieter



TO EXPERIENCE THE PHYSICAL BEAUTY of an unfamiliar nation, the uniqueness of its cultural traditions, and the hospitality of its people is thrilling. Yet often we return home wishing that we had been able to really get to know the people, especially the women—to learn about their faith, their struggles, and their hopes.

Through the Global Education and Advocacy Program, jointly sponsored by Women of the ELCA and the ELCA Division for Global Mission Companion Synods Program*, women throughout the church are gaining insights into the lives of women in other nations and are preparing to serve as global advocates. These women are not casual tourists. They are committed to working together for justice for women around the world.

The international study seminars held each year focus on issues affecting women in companion

synod churches and nations. Participants visit a variety of projects that promote women's development, and they learn from the stories their international sisters share—about their efforts to combat poverty, to educate themselves and others, to cope with domestic violence, and about their faithful commitment to proclaim the gospel. When the women return home they commit themselves to sharing their experiences and to lifting up issues affecting women in their companion synod churches and nations.

Here is a sampling of comments from women who have participated in these seminars:

“The experience helped me to look outside of myself and my country for some deep soul-searching regarding my beliefs about who we are as a country, who we are as a people, and what we should be about as a church.”

“The seminar took all the knowledge I had in my head about hunger and poverty and put it into my heart.”

Please pray for the women who are participating in the 2001 seminar in Madagascar, November 1–17, that they may travel safely and that their hearts will be opened to the gifts of courage, faith, and hope they will receive from their sisters there.

Future seminar sites include East Africa in 2002, West Africa in 2003, and Latin America in 2004. For additional information, contact Women of the ELCA, Global Education and Advocacy, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631; 773-380-2465; strieter@elca.org.

*The ELCA Companion Synod Program pairs synods in the United States with Lutheran church bodies around the world for mutual learning and sharing experiences.

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING



WOMEN OF THE ELCA SCHOLARSHIPS by Faith Fretheim

WOMEN OF THE ELCA AND ITS PREDECESSOR ORGANIZATIONS HAVE A LONG HISTORY OF SHARING THEIR BLESSINGS WITH OTHERS: QUILTING, FUND-RAISING, AND ADVOCATING FOR AND WITH A VARIETY OF PEOPLE ON A VARIETY OF CAUSES, AND PROVIDING SCHOLARSHIP ASSISTANCE FOR WOMEN WHO ARE ACTIVE MEMBERS OF ELCA CONGREGATIONS.

WOMEN OF THE ELCA **SCHOLARSHIPS** FALL INTO THREE CATEGORIES: THE CHILSTROM SCHOLARSHIP, THE SCHMEIDER LEADERSHIP SCHOLARSHIP, AND SCHOLARSHIPS FOR LUTHERAN LAYWOMEN.

The Chilstrom Scholarship was established in 1995 to honor the first bishop of the ELCA, Herb Chilstrom, and his wife, Rev. Corinne Chilstrom. This fund assists Lutheran women who are second-career students at an ELCA seminary, endorsed by their Synodical Candidacy Committee, and preparing for ordained ministry. Six women have received assistance from this scholarship since its inception. The first recipient, Margareta Breden, a member of the Delaware, Maryland Synodical Women's Organization, was ordained in 1999.

One of the year-2000 recipients, Dawn M. Gorges, wrote, "It pleases me to see Women of the ELCA responding to women's changing lives. Women lead differently these days, but in order to do that they must continue to be nourished in the Word in ways that are meaningful to them. Thank you for your support this year. As the organization has supported me, I will continue to support congregational Women of the ELCA groups as I serve the church."

The Schneider Leadership Scholarship was established to develop and promote women's leadership at ELCA colleges and seminaries. It provides assistance to senior women administrators and faculty members so they are able to participate in leadership and management training institutes. Each

applicant must first be nominated by the president of her institution.

Debbie Heida, vice president for student development and dean of students at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, received a Schneider Scholarship in 2000. Debbie says, "I am so incredibly appreciative of the support of the Women of the ELCA scholarship to assist in my attendance at the Institute for Educational Management at Harvard University! I feel fortunate to be working in one of our colleges and to be given support to continue my learning ... to be challenged in thinking differently about our campus structures and the people who we work with and whom we serve, to compare problems and approaches and learn new ways of approaching both. I feel blessed both by the vote of confidence in me and the program itself."

We will describe the variety of scholarships for laywomen and introduce the recipients of the 2001 scholarships in an upcoming *LWT* article.

Contributions of any size and inquiries are always welcome and appreciated. Contact the program director, Faith Fretheim, at 1-800-638-3522, ext. 2736, or email Fretheim@elca.org. She will joyfully assist you in your decision-making process.



Young Women Unite!

by Dianha Ortega

YOUNG WOMEN WILL BE ESPECIALLY WELCOME AT THE 2002 WOMEN OF THE ELCA TRIENNIAL GATHERING IN PHILADELPHIA. A SPECIAL TRACK CALLED YOUNG WOMEN SEEING VISIONS (YWSV) IS SCHEDULED FOR JULY 11–13. NOT ONLY IS THIS FOR YOUNG WOMEN, BUT IT IS PLANNED BY YOUNG WOMEN!

A group of young women met in Chicago in May to help organize YWSV. Authentic questions, discussion, and hope filled our time together. Here is a summary of the exciting information we can begin sharing about this upcoming event.

The goal of Young Women Seeing Visions at the 2002 Triennial Gathering is to provide a space for young women to explore and nurture their spirituality.

YWSV will focus on the gathering theme, “Listen, God Is Calling,” through the concept of emptying oneself in order to fully listen to and receive God. By giving of ourselves to others, we receive God. Think of a bowl representing you, decorated to show your uniqueness in being created in the image of God. How do you fill and empty yourself as a bowl in the community of others? How does the water of the Holy Spirit fill all the spaces in your bowl? How does God call us to pour

out what we cannot contain ourselves? How does the richness of faith cause our bowl to overflow?

The YWSV track will weave throughout the gathering, enabling the participants to also experience workshops, the interactive exhibit area at Convention Without Walls, as well as the Triennial Gathering in action. There will be diversity among the group leaders as well.

Participants will get a chance to experience the “open space technology” used by Lutheran Youth Organization. This technology creates space to address issues on the minds of people gathered in any place. Sounds intriguing? Come to Philadelphia and find out how it works!

Who’s Invited?

Some women consider age 16 young, others age 50. There will be no age parameters for Young Women Seeing Visions participants! Though this might seem a little loose, we are intentionally letting the Holy Spirit bring together any and all women who want to be a part of this track. It will be exciting!

For additional information about Young Women Seeing Visions, contact Dianha Ortega via email at dianha_ortega@elca.org.

BETWEEN YOU AND ME

God Knows

by Catherine I.H. Braasch

IF MY FAITH JOURNEY HAS TAUGHT ME ANYTHING ABOUT PRAYER, IT IS THIS: WHEN I AM STRUGGLING WITH PRAYER, GOD ALREADY KNOWS WHAT'S GOING ON! I CAN CLING TO GOD'S PROMISE, CALL ON MY SISTERS AND BROTHERS FOR SUPPORT IN PRAYER, AND PREPARE TO BE SURPRISED BY THE ANSWERS.

I appreciate Women of the ELCA's commitment to prayer. We pray when we gather in Bible study groups, parenting groups, support groups, and service groups. We organize telephone and Internet prayer chains, using them like a "911" emergency line when someone is sick or hurting, or when there is cause for celebration and thanksgiving. We respond to the quiet, whispered request: "I can't tell you what's going on, but I need your prayers." We pray when we're not asked to pray but are led to pray by the Holy Spirit. Somewhere, someone is ready, willing, and able to pray in response to all kinds of requests.

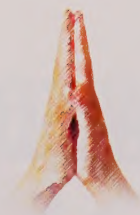
Sometimes when we pray we're like Martha, who pleaded for her sister Mary's help: "But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to (Jesus) and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me'" (Luke 10:40). Other times, when it is just not within us to pray, "the Spirit helps us in our weakness" (Romans 8:26).

In the original Greek, Martha's plea ("tell her to help me") and God's promise ("the Spirit helps us") use forms of the same word. This wording captures the Holy Spirit intervening, taking hold of us, accompanying us for needs and occasions great or small.

Be surprised by prayer today, even if you don't know what to pray for or how to say it. God knows, and the Holy Spirit is already praying with you, for you, and through you in ways that will never fail to surprise.

If you've ever received a letter, card, or email message that said, "I'm praying for you," you know how encouraging that can be! Today, surprise someone with a note, email message, or phone call, or visit to let them know they're in your prayers. Be the presence of the Holy Spirit for someone.

Catherine I.H. Braasch is executive director of **Women of the ELCA**.



AMEN!

The Invitation to Worship

by Catherine Malotky

GOD, YOU FREED OUR ANCESTORS IN FAITH FROM HUNDREDS OF YEARS OF BONDAGE SO THEY MIGHT WORSHIP YOU (EXODUS 8:1). WHY?

Sometimes we get the idea from Scripture that you demand our adoration. It makes sense to our human way of thinking. After all, you are the God who created the universe, who existed before time, and who exists outside of anything we can fathom. It would make sense to stand in awe of you, silenced by your power, your majesty, and the awareness of our own insignificance. I guess maybe we should—even if it is just so we are reminded how other you are, how beyond us. Maybe we need to worship for our own sake.

But what do you get out of it? You don't need us to worship you, do you? What could we possibly add to your existence? How can we help you grow or become? We humans can't function without affirmation. But that's not true of you, God, is it? Why would you need little peons like us to worship you? Certainly your self-esteem is durable and intact?

Why would you work so hard to tell us you love us? Why would you offer the life of your own child, even your own God-ness, to be close to us? Why did you take on the limitations of time and space? Is this, perhaps, about your love for us more than it is about your absolute power and majesty?

Or maybe your love for us is the most important thing about your power and majesty?

It's funny that such a great God would choose to be vulnerable to us, we who are so clearly not God but just the work of God's hands. So perhaps, because you love us so, our worship matters to you, too. It's not a one-way street but an invitation to be close to you, even a part of being close to you.

And perhaps it's not so much about doing it right, although certainly doing worship well helps when we are all trying to do it together. Perhaps worship is beyond what happens on Sunday morning. Perhaps worship is also the way we live our lives and how we talk to you. Perhaps it's worship to love our bodies, with all their perceived flaws, because you are the one who made them for us. Perhaps it's worship to follow the Eighth Commandment when we hear gossip or to eagerly give our time and expertise to causes that mirror your justice in the world. Perhaps it's all worship—every step, decision, and thought.

Thank you, God, that our worship matters. Bless our efforts to your glory.

Catherine Malotky is an ELCA pastor and plan benefits writer at the ELCA Board of Pensions.

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I was glad when they said to me,

"Let us go to the house of the LORD!"

Psalm 122:1

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